

## A LINK WITH ENGLAND'S PAST

BY NOEL ROBINSON

IT is at once a singular and a happy circumstance that the most notable May Day commemoration in the British Empire should take place in a city only cut from the virgin forest fifty or so years ago, a city situate six thousand miles from the Old Land where the beautiful custom originated.

The words "most notable" may suggest exaggeration. Yet their use is absolutely justifiable. England is the home of May Day celebrations and of hundreds of May Queens, and of as many delightful crowning ceremonies, both in villages and upon the outskirts of towns. But never—no, not even at Knutsford or in the garden city of Letchworth—has the present writer witnessed the crowning of the May Queen upon such a scale, or before so many thousands of spectators, as upon the half dozen occasions when he has had the good fortune—always in glorious sunshine—to witness the ceremony and the Maypole dancing at the Royal City of New Westminster.

A well known old Londoner, who has seen many commemorations in both countries, agrees with this judgment, though he states that he has seen the accompanying sports upon a greater scale in the Old Country. "But never," he adds, "have I seen the crowning of the Queen made at once such a pastoral and civic ceremony, and nowhere would it be possible to gather together so many ex-May Queens as will be the case in New Westminster.

May Day in England dates back many years and there are still Maypole streets and Maypole alleys in various places where once the Maypole raised itself and children danced upon the greensward.

Upon one occasion England had what has come down in history as the "Evil May Day." This occurred in the reign of Henry the Eighth, when the city of London was overrun by French people and the apprentice boys of London, believing that the French were too much in the popular eye, and disliking their foreign ways, brought about a riot.

The result was that 14 of the apprentices were executed and 400 were marched through the streets with nothing on but their shirts, and with their hands tied behind them and halters round their necks, to Westminster. The population was touched by the youth of the offenders and cries of "Mercy" arose. These reached the Royal ears and the King pardoned the apprentices.

Later on May Day was given over, to a large extent, to the milk-maids, who garlanded their pails with flowers and marched through the streets of London. Strange to say the chimney sweeps also made a festival of the day. In England a curious feature of our own time has been the fact that, led by several prominent ritualistic clergymen, a hint was taken from France, and the crowning of the Rose Queen has, to some extent, eclipsed the crowning of the May Queen.